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To: All candidates in Vancouver Island ridings in the 2017 B.C. Election

RE: Urgent action for Vancouver Island's rainforest and communities

Dear candidates,

I am writing to share with you our recent call for urgent action for Vancouver Island's rainforest and communities from 25 provincial and international environmental organizations:

<http://sierraclub.bc.ca/25-organizations-call-for-action-vancouver-islands-rainforest-communities/>

Vancouver Island's rainforests are among the rarest ecosystems on the planet. They are also among its richest - they have been home to First Nations since time immemorial, and they contribute to a diverse economy, including forestry, tourism and wild salmon in indigenous and non-indigenous communities.

Unfortunately, today, the vast majority of productive old-growth rainforest on Vancouver Island has been logged and replaced by young forest. Only about 10 per cent of the biggest trees are still standing, and some types of forest such as old-growth Douglas fir on south-eastern Vancouver Island have less than one per cent of its original range left.

At-risk species, like the Marbled Murrelet, that depend on ancient trees are in decline together with the ancient forests. The original record-high amount of carbon stored in ancient trees has been dramatically reduced as a result of logging and has contributed to climate change. What remains is truly one of our best allies in the fight against climate change.

With so little left, it is now only a matter of time before the logging industry runs out of old-growth trees to harvest and fully transitions to logging second-growth. But despite shrinking revenue, declining job numbers from logging, and the increasing value of the remaining intact forests for species, clean water and air, carbon, and as a basis for a diverse economy, more than 9,000 hectares of old-growth rainforest are still being cut every year on Vancouver Island.

That's why more and more voices are speaking up for protection of endangered rainforest and better forestry practices. In the spring of 2016, British Columbia's Chamber of Commerce voted to protect old-growth trees where they have greater economic value for communities if left standing. In September 2016, the majority of delegates at the Union of B.C. Municipalities convention voted to protect all of Vancouver Island's remaining old-growth forest on public land. In January 2017, the Ahousaht First Nation in Clayoquot Sound announced a land use vision including proposals for new protected areas.

The finalization of the Great Bear Rainforest and Haida Gwaii Agreements by First Nations governments and the B.C. government, with the support of a number of environmental organizations

and forestry companies, shows that solutions are possible. As a result of these agreements the majority of the old-growth rainforests in the Great Bear Rainforest and on Haida Gwaii are now protected from logging. First Nations' shared decision-making with the province over land use in their traditional territories has been solidified and there is certainty about how much old-growth is available for logging subject to stringent standards.

South of the Great Bear region, a century of logging has produced an ecological emergency in coastal rainforests. Climate impacts like droughts and storms exert additional pressure and result in severe consequences for watersheds and salmon. With a few exceptions, land-use plans are not meaningfully addressing First Nations rights and interests and are not based on modern conservation science. Meanwhile, raw-log exports are at a record high and jobs per cubic metre at a record low compared to other parts of the world, leaving neither healthy forests nor healthy communities behind.

Unless the next provincial government changes course to protect and restore what remains of our endangered old-growth, much of Vancouver Island could turn into a severely degraded landscape this century. That's why we are urging the next B.C. government to take immediate action for the well-being of indigenous and non-indigenous communities, for biodiversity, clean air and water, long-term forestry jobs and healthy communities, and to save one of the world's most efficient carbon sinks.

We must start with protecting remaining intact rainforest areas imminently threatened by logging, for example the Central Walbran and East Creek, and using a science-based phased approach for protecting and restoring the remaining old-growth forest, starting with the most endangered ecosystems. Comprehensive steps for conservation and improved forest management for Vancouver Island must respect First Nations rights and interests, enable a transition to sustainable second-growth forestry, support diverse economic activities such as tourism, and reduce carbon emissions.

There is one region of hope on Vancouver Island: The land use vision announced by the Ahousaht First Nation in January outlines a way forward for Indigenous stewardship in Vancouver Island's most intact tracts of old-growth forest and will require political and financial support. Find out more here: <https://thetyee.ca/Opinion/2017/04/29/Ahousaht-Land-Use-Vision/>

Saving our best ally in the fight against global warming means improving forest management to reduce carbon emissions from forests and ending wasteful practices such as slash burning.

We are certainly at a cross roads. The next BC government will have a crucial opportunity to make a difference in the fate for Vancouver Island's remaining endangered old-growth forest and their countless benefits to the economy and communities.

We are writing you to urge you to consider the overwhelming evidence highlighting the risk of ecological collapse of the species that depend on intact old-growth rainforest and the risk of economic collapse of forestry jobs depending on logging old-growth on Vancouver Island.

Endangered rainforest ecosystems need protection and the forestry industry needs support to shift from old-growth logging to better forestry practices for second-growth. This has to include creating a higher number of jobs per cubic metre through value adding economic activity. To accomplish these goals, we must rapidly phase out the practice of exporting raw logs.

We would be happy to hear from you about your commitment to stand tall for Vancouver Island's ancient forests and forest-dependent communities. We encourage you to raise this important issue before and after the provincial election, and to drive the transformation of Vancouver Island toward both ecological and economic sustainability.

Sincerely,

Jens Wieting
Forests and Climate Campaigner
Sierra Club BC